# The 'Polite' Face: The Social Meanings Attached to Facial Appearance in Early Eighteenth-Century Didactic Journals

**Kathryn Woods (University of Edinburgh)**

**Key Words:**

Face, appearance, expression, politeness, Addison and Steele, identity.

**Abstract:**

The early eighteenth-century English elite were obsessed with their looks, and this article will examine why. Through analysis of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's didactic journals the *Tatler*, the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*, this paper will explore what symbolic meanings and associations were attached to the face in this period and how they informed the ways in which the face was perceived. This discussion will show that a range of evidence contained within these papers reveals that the face was inscribed with many complex meanings directly informed by the social idiom that characterised elite culture in this period: 'politeness'. It will be argued that looks were of such concern to contemporaries in the early eighteenth century because of the ways in which Addison and Steele presented the active management of the face through its expression as a plausible means by which individuals could render their 'personal identity' and display it to others.

Looks preoccupied the early eighteenth-century English elite. This was because within elite 'polite society' the face represented an important symbol of personal identity that informed the extent to which contemporaries were considered 'polite'. Consequently, the appearance of the face and its social judgement became key topics of cultural debate in this period. Driving and reflecting this social preoccupation was a diverse range of print media that presented and discussed exemplary forms of 'polite' aesthetic corporeality, such as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's enormously popular periodical journals *The Tatler* (1709-1711), *The Spectator* (1711-14) and *The Guardian* (1713). This paper will examine the discussion of facial appearance within these journals in order to reveal what meanings and associations were attached to different facial forms in elite 'polite' society. In order to achieve this, this paper will firstly outline the ways in which these didactic journals can be used to decode the symbolic meanings attached to the face and its features. It will then attempt to show how

these symbolic meanings were constructed in reference to the 'polite' social values of the eighteenth-century elite. Finally, it will demonstrate the ways in which these periodicals influenced how individuals perceived the features they saw exhibited by the face and socially judged people who displayed them.

'Politeness' has long been regarded as a term synonymous with elite culture in eighteenth-century Britain. This is because in this culture, 'polite' and 'politeness' emerged as key terms which contemporaries used to refer to a range of different social and cultural practices that were thought to display civility, good breeding, manners, easiness and gentility[24]. Lawrence Klein argues that 'politeness' began its career as a term used to refer to normative forms of social behaviour displayed by the elite[25]. In its most basic formulation, he proposes that it was a code of social behaviour concerned with the display of forms of conduct associated with decorum in behaviour and personal style, sociability, gentility, improvement and worldliness[26]. However, over the course of the century, 'politeness' came to be used as a term that referred to much more than mere etiquette[27]. Rather, 'politeness' came to represent an all-embracing philosophy of manners that promoted greater ease, openness and accessibility in forms of social interaction, at the same time setting demanding prescriptive standards as to how individuals should behave towards one another in social situations[28]. 'Politeness' must therefore be acknowledged to have represented a broad-ranging social idiom that had a significant impact on many distinctive aspects of eighteenth-century culture.

The emergence of *The Tatler*, *The Spectator* and *The Guardian* have long been regarded as literary developments that were symbiotic to the progress of 'politeness'. Indeed, Addison and Steele have often been considered to have played a key role in formulating 'politeness' as a wide-ranging social movement and in disseminating the modes of social behaviour it promoted to society at large[29]. Addison and Steele certainly perceived their endeavours in these terms and, through their publications, sought to instruct the

[24] P. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* Harlow, Longman, 2001, p. 23.
[25] L. Klein, "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, No. 18: 2, 1984-1985, p. 186.
[26] L. Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century", *The Historical Journal*, No. 45: 4, 2002, p. 887.
[27] M. Snodin and J. Styles, *Design and the Decorative Arts, 1500-1900*, London, V&A, 2001, p. 183.
[28] L. Klein, "Politeness and the British Eighteenth Century", op. cit., p. 887.
[29] L. Klein, "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness", op. cit., p. 187.

literate populace in how they should want to be 'perceived and received' in the emergent public sphere[30]. Addison famously stated in one of the earliest issues of the *Spectator*:

> I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both Ways find their account in the Speculation of the Day…It was said of *Socrates*, that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables, and in Coffee-houses[31].

Thus by parading, describing and discussing, but rarely explicitly defining, a new set of supposedly more natural 'polite' social manners and the ways they should be employed in daily life, Addison and Steele equipped their readers with the means to empower themselves through engagement in 'polite' forms of social interaction. The emergence of the genre of the periodical essay was therefore central to the construction of the cultural idiom of 'politeness'.

The *Tatler*, the *Spectator* and the *Guardian* also played an essential role in the dissemination of 'politeness' as a result of their enormous popularity. Although the journals themselves only appeared, at different times, during the relatively short period from 1709 to 1714, it is essential to note the huge circulation of these papers and their significant social impact. Donald Bond, the editor of the modern collected editions of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator,* estimates that each daily issue of the *Spectator* enjoyed a circulation of some 4,000 copies, with some issues reaching sales figures above 14,000[32]. However, it is difficult to quantify the paper's successes by such figures alone, as Erin Mackie shows that individual copies of these essays would frequently have been circulated among the clientele of the numerous coffee houses in London at this time[33]. Furthermore, the continuing influence of these journals throughout the century cannot be ignored. John Calhoun Stephens, editor of the modern collection of the least popular of the three journals, the *Guardian*, has shown that even this work went through more than thirty editions in England before 1900[34]. This evidence clearly demonstrates that it was through Addison and Steele's enormously popular periodicals that 'politeness' found its widest public audience. It also suggests that in the

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[30] R. Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Transformed the Way We See Our Bodies and Souls,* London, Penguin, 2004, p. 114.
[31] *The Spectator*, No. 10 (12th March 1711).
[32] D. Bond (ed.), "Introduction", *The Spectator*, 5 Vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press,1965, p. xxvi.
[33] E. Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in the Tatler and Spectator Papers*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 18.
[34] J. Calhoun Stephens (ed.), "Introduction", *The Guardian*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1982, p. 35.

eighteenth century 'politeness' was most commonly understood in the terms formulated by Addison and Steele.

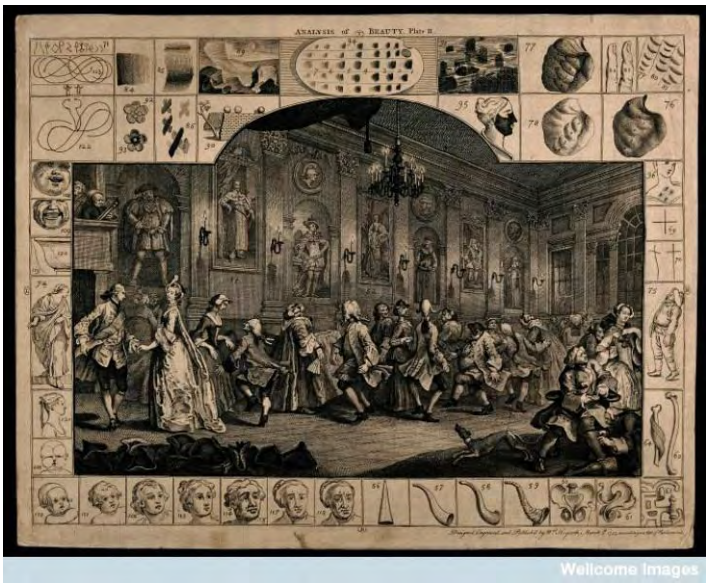
**Imagining Early Eighteenth-Century Didactic Journals as 'Archives' of the Face**

In the didactic journals, the appearance of the face was a common and enduring theme of interest. The face was not only discussed in articles that directly investigated its appearance and different parts, but passing references were also made in articles on different topics, descriptions of real and fictional characters, and in the language that the authors employed to describe the face. However, it is important to recognise that the social meanings attached to the face were often highly dependent on the discursive framework in which it was mentioned, and that in different contexts the meanings attached to face could be highly distinctive. This was because, while Addison and Steele played an important editorial role in dictating the general tone and content of the journals, the construction of the journals was a collective endeavour in several ways. A range of authors, including Henry Martyn, Alexander Pope, John Hughes, Thomas Tickell, John Gay and Eustace Budgell, all contributed a significant number of individual articles to these different journals. A vast number of articles also featured letters received from readers and, for example, almost 250 of the 555 original issues of the *Spectator* contained letters[35]. This situation occurred because Addison and Steele actively encouraged 'audience participation' in the construction of their papers. For instance, the *Guardian* repeatedly urged readers to submit contributions at the 'lion's head letter-box' erected at Button's coffee house. Finally, most daily articles of the journals, when they were first published, contained a substantial number of advertisements and notices submitted by booksellers, perfumers, cosmetics producers and members of the public. The content of the didactic journals was thus constructed by a vast number of different authors for distinctive purposes. This is the reason why the discussion of the face within these journals was so highly diverse and dependent on the framework in which it was located.

In accordance with this understanding, it may be useful to imagine these journals as 'archives' of evidence for examining the face. By conceptualising the journals in these terms, the historian can respond to the different sorts of material contained within these works in ways that are methodologically appropriate and make allowances for their distinctive modes

[35] D. Bond, "Introduction", op. cit., p. XIV.

of production and construction, and the intent of their different authors. This part of the discussion will now proceed by outlining some of the distinctive frameworks in which the face was examined within these journals and how these different sorts of evidence can be interpreted to reveal the meanings attached to the face.




**William Hogarth's 'Analysis of Beauty' (London, 1753)**

In the first instance, discussion of facial appearance often featured as the main object of the narrator's comment in specific articles. Particular examples of this kind from the *Spectator* include articles that examined the display of political affiliation through the placement of face patches, local grinning competitions, different styles of male facial hair throughout history and the activities of a group called the 'Ugly Club'. Similarly, the *Tatler* and the *Guardian* featured articles that contained learned dissertations on noses and the meanings of particular smiles. This evidence is of use as it demonstrates the ways Addison and Steele constructed explicit knowledge about the meanings of the face and how they should be interpreted by contemporaries.

On the other hand, discussion of facial appearance was not strictly limited to the articles in which it made up the primary object of examination. The language used in connection to the different parts of the face in articles where it was not explicitly discussed is highly revealing. A survey of the language used to describe the actions the eyes

performed, such as ‘observation’, ‘gazing’, ‘glancing’, ‘staring’ and ‘ogling’, suggests that the eyes were understood as performing a vast array of different actions. In addition, the language used in conjunction with the eyes indicates that they were often believed capable of expressing the particular sentiment of the person engaged in the action of ‘looking’. In this respect, eyes were portrayed as being ‘knowing’, ‘charmed’, ‘un-prejudiced’, ‘respectful’, ‘competitive’ and even ‘evil’. Hence, this linguistic evidence demonstrates that the eyes were recognised not only as an important embodied means through which contemporaries perceived the world they inhabited, but also as a mode through which they conveyed embodied meaning to other social actors. Analysis of the language used to describe the appearance and actions of the face throughout the didactic journals is highly revealing as it evidences many of the implicit social meanings associated with the face.

The appearance of the face was also frequently mentioned in descriptions of the characters that feature within the journals. One of the best examples of this variety is provided in the description of the face of the narrator of the *Spectator*. For Mr Spectator, the shape of his face was a subject of considerable concern. He complained throughout the journal of having what he called a ‘short face’. He stated in issue 17: ‘I am a little unhappy in the Mold of my Face, which is not quite so long as it is broad’. Musing over the reasons for his strange appearance, Mr Spectator wonders whether it ‘might not partly arise from my opening my Mouth much seldomer than other People, and by Consequence not so much lengthening the Fibres of my Visage’. In many ways, Addison and Steele’s description of Mr Spectator’s face reflected the characterisation of the narrator as a silent, unseen, and reflective ‘spectator’ of mankind. Consequently, this example shows that by analysing these kinds of literary facial description, historians can establish the meanings attached to different forms of facial appearance and how they informed the ways people perceived the character of individuals that displayed them.

One of the most interesting aspects of the construction of the periodicals was the common editorial practice of publishing letters from their readers. Such source evidence allows analysis of the ways that the looks of the face informed individuals’ lived experiences and locates the ideas that Addison and Steele promoted about the face within a broader cultural debate. However, using these letters as evidence in this way is not entirely unproblematic. In the first instance, the letters were often published anonymously, under pseudo-names given by Addison and Steele, or were only identified by the author’s initials.

Therefore, with a few notable exceptions, they cannot be attributed to any particular individuals. Secondly, the majority of the letters sent to the journals do not survive to the present, and as a result it is almost impossible, in most cases, to analyse the extent to which Addison and Steele, like many other periodical editors of the period, modified and edited their content. This is significant, as evidence from the *Spectator* suggests that the extent to which letters were edited largely depended on the content and construction of individual letters. While in issue 442 Steele admitted that he sometimes altered the letters he received 'by dressing them in my own Style, by leaving out what wou'd not appear like mine, and by adding whatever might be proper to adapt them to the Character and Genius of my Paper', he stated in 268, 'I am of Opinion that I ought sometimes to lay before the World the plain Letters of my Correspondents in the artless Dress in which they hastily send them'. This suggests that, although the overall theme or content of the letters was probably authentic, we must be careful about assuming that the letters published in the periodicals appeared in exactly the ways formulated by the original authors.

Despite the stated problems, these letters do represent valuable source material as they offer us some insight into the ways in which individuals' life experiences were informed by the look of their faces. A letter published in issue number 306 of the *Spectator* from a correspondent named as 'Parthenissa', who recounted the sad story of the ravages wrought by smallpox upon her face, is a fine example of this sort of evidence. Parthenissa stated that before she contracted the illness she was in 'Possession of as much Beauty and as many Lovers as any young Lady in England' but she bemoaned that the disfiguring scars left upon her face had transformed her life and lamented that her lovers were now at the feet of her rivals, and her rivals were 'every Day bewailing' her. The value of these letters is that they enable the reconstruction of how the meanings attached to facial appearance manifested themselves in an individual's everyday life experience. Additionally, they offer a more complicated picture of how the appearance of the face was perceived in 'polite society' than the articles of the journals where the face was explicitly examined. This is because the content of these articles more commonly presented an idealised 'polite' version of how Addison and Steele believed the face should be socially judged than the discussion of the face that appeared in the letters, which were written from the perspective of particular individuals.

Finally, vital information is evidenced in the large number of advertisements for cosmetic products that featured in the periodicals. One of the most common advertisements of this type proclaimed the virtues of a cream wash called the 'Chrystal Cosmetick'. This wash, as first stated in issue 25 of the *Spectator*, was well known for its ability to take 'off all Morphews, Pimples and Freckles' and in curing red faces 'from what cause soever.' Through such advertisements we can thus establish what forms of aesthetic appearance the 'polite' sought to display, what exterior forms they attempted to remove or hide, and the types of products that were available for this purpose. Like pieces of correspondence, such adverts also serve to question the dominance and cultural interpretation of the ideas promoted by Addison and Steele, as their presence stands in contrast to the frequent attacks made against the use of cosmetics within the content of the journal articles.

**The Symbolic Meanings of the Face**

The face is a notoriously complex theoretical entity. When we encounter a face, we simultaneously encounter a recognised symbol of an individual's personal identity but also a symbol, in and of itself, that is inscribed with an intricate series of culturally informed associations. The face consequently represents important terrain upon which individuals negotiate the boundaries between the self and society. It is through the cultural meanings which are attached to the face in a specific context that social actors are able to interpret the appearance of the face as a communicative sign system of the self and give meaning to what they perceive. As a result, the face must be understood to have its own culturally constructed language, which is invested with powerful symbolic significance in the context in which it is displayed.[36] In the early eighteenth century, the didactic journals played a significant role in codifying a framework of the symbolic meanings of the face in relation to the social idiom of 'politeness' that provided contemporaries with a systematic structure through which they could decode the symbols displayed by the appearance of the face.

In the didactic journals, when the face was considered as a singular entity, its analysis was repeatedly framed within wider forms of cultural discussion concerning 'beauty'. David Turner suggests that critical appreciation of beauty in all its manifestations was a central

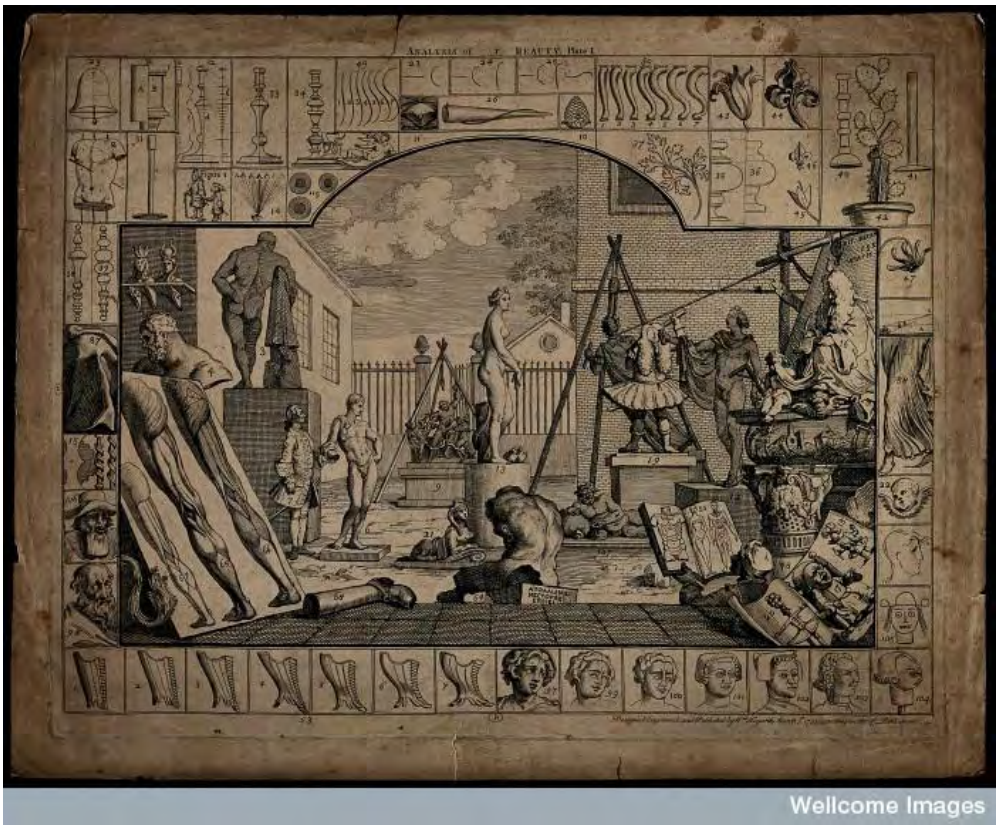
[36] P. Magli, "The Face and the Soul", in M. Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, vol. 2*., New York, Urzone, 1989, p. 90.

feature of discussions concerning 'politeness', taste and refinement.[37] In the early eighteenth century, these dialectics of taste and beauty were heavily influenced by the classical aesthetic, which was characterised by its emphasis on form, simplicity, proportion and restraint. In many ways, the classical aesthetic appears to have come into vogue as it represented a physical manifestation of the social idiom of 'politeness'. The classical aesthetic, in turn, heavily informed the way in which the face was perceived as a singular entity and accordingly there was a clear idealised and aesthetically reinforced cultural notion of what the most beautiful facial form should look like in 'polite society'. Roy Porter proposes that the classical ideal of beauty held that the face should be symmetrical, have regular and harmonious features such as a high forehead and aquiline nose, and have light, pale or fair coloured skin.[38] In a broad sense, the classical aesthetic, when it concerned the face, was organised around the judgement of four qualifying standards: colour, regularity, symmetry and proportion. Consequently, discussion of the beautiful face in the didactic journals usually referenced at least one or two, if not all, of these measures of beauty. To draw upon but one example, the use of these qualifying measures of beauty to judge the ways individuals looked is seen in article number 4 of the *Tatler,* where the narrator discussed the beauty of a woman depicted in a painting he had recently seen exhibited, who he called 'Clarissa'. He stated: 'When you look at Clarissa, you see the most exact harmony of feature, complexion, and shape.' Classical notions of beauty and its qualifying standards were therefore of consequence in 'polite society' as they had a direct bearing on the ways that individuals' faces were perceived, described and judged.

While faces that measured up to the classical idealised notion of beauty were applauded in 'polite society', faces that displayed forms of corporeality that did not match this design of aesthetic beauty were negatively identified as being 'ugly' or 'deformed'. Ugly faces were believed to be those that were oddly-shaped, asymmetrical, irregular, weak-chinned, long, lopsided and that displayed over or under-sized features; that is, ugly forms of facial appearance were considered to be those that did not adequately measure against defining characteristics of beauty displayed by 'idealised' classical facial forms. In issue 17, the *Spectator* published a series of points, entitled 'The Act of Deformity', which laid out the

[37] D. Turner, "The Body Beautiful", in L. Kalof & W. Bynum (eds) *A Cultural History of the Human Body*, Oxford, Berg, 2010, p. 113.
[38] R. Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and the Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900*, London, Reakiton, 2001, p. 71.

rules of admission for a group called the ‘Ugly Club’. It was stated: ‘That no Person whatsoever shall be admitted without a visible Quearity in his Aspect, or peculiar Cast of Countenance’ and ‘that if the Quantity of any Man’s Nose be eminently miscalculated, whether as to Length or Breadth, he shall have a just Pretence to be elected’. The article went on to state that for the leader of the group there was no member of the society more deserving of praise than ‘old Nell Trott’, who was described as ‘one of the Extraordinary Works of Nature; but as for Complexion, Shape, Features, so valued by others, they are all mere Outside and Symmetry, which is his Aversion’. In the early eighteenth century, the ‘ugly’ or ‘deformed’ face was judged to be that which did not display features that matched the qualifying principles of beauty as defined in classical aesthetic theory.




**William Hogarth's 'Analysis of Beauty' (London, 1753)**

It is important to recognise that cultural notions of facial 'beauty' and 'ugliness' were not the only factors that influenced how the face was perceived. Rather, many facial features were inscribed with their own specific meanings and associations that informed their social judgement. In the didactic journals, the eyes were the most frequently discussed features of the face. This was because the eyes were thought to share a close connection with the soul. In the vast majority of cases, the relationship between the eyes and the soul was discussed in relation to the sensory action of sight. It was believed that it was through the eyes that information most directly reached the soul of the observer. Addison declared in issue 411 of the *Spectator*: 'Our Sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses'. Addison afforded sight this supreme position in the sensory hierarchy because he believed: 'It is this Sense which furnishes the Imagination with its Ideas.' In turn, Addison asserted that the pleasures of the imagination, as informed by the sense of sight, had the most immediate effect upon the soul because they were not disturbed by the workings of the mind. He declared: 'A beautiful Prospect delights the Soul...the Pleasures of the Imagination have this Advantage, above those of the Understanding, that they are more obvious and more easie to be acquired'.

Contemporaries did not simply believe that information flowed in one direction from the eyes to the soul. Instead, it was generally agreed that the feelings of the soul manifested themselves in the appearance or expression of the eyes. A series of letters published in the *Spectator* examined this relationship at length. The eye, noted one commentator:

> seems as much the Receptacle and Seat of our Passions, Appetites and Inclinations as the Mind it self; and at least it is the outward Portal to introduce them to the House within, or rather the common Thorough-fare to let our Affections pass in and out. Love, Anger, Pride, and Avarice, all visibly move in those little Orbs.[39]

In this passage, the eyes were thus presented as 'openings' through which the feelings of the soul could transcend the corporeal boundary. It was thought the 'openness' of eyes meant that their appearance revealed and expressed the inner feelings of the soul. Another correspondent to the *Spectator* manifested this sentiment clearly in his assertion that: 'A beautiful Eye makes silence eloquent, a kind Eye makes Contradiction an Assent, an enraged Eye makes beauty Deformed'[40]. The eyes were therefore imagined as windows through

[39] *The Spectator*, No. 250 (17th December 1711).
[40] Ibid, No. 252 (19th December 1711).

which the soul could move in and out of the corporeal limits of the flesh, and as a result their appearance was perceived as an embodied expression of the soul.

The associations attached to parts of the face were also often explicitly tied to the ways that aspects of the face had been used to metaphorically describe or symbolise certain moral characteristics in much older discourses. In the Middle Ages the loss of the nose through leprosy was seen as a visual indicator of sexual excess, lechery and covetousness[41]. Reflecting this belief, in the didactic journals the nose was frequently used as a symbol of sexual degeneracy and was most commonly mentioned in relation to venereal disease. In the *Tatler*, the narrator urged young fresh-faced men coming to town not to consort with prostitutes, warning them that such women were 'after their noses'. He cautioned:

> regard every Town-Woman as a particular Kind of Siren, that has a Design upon their Noses, and that, amidst her Flatteries and Allurements, they will fancy she speaks to 'em in that humorous Phrase of old *Plautus*: *Ego tibi Faciem denasabo mordieùs.* 'Keep your Face out of my Way, or I'll bite off your nose'[42].

In the didactic journals, due to much older associations between the nose and sin, the nose was therefore inscribed with many negative connotations and was commonly employed to symbolise sexual impropriety and deviance.

The discursive constitution of the nose as an 'impolite' symbol meant that descriptions of the nose were frequently omitted from descriptions of beautiful people. Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, in contrast, descriptions of 'ugly' noses were repeatedly cited in depictions of individuals who were 'ugly' or who had a flawed moral character. An advertisement requesting information about a runaway female servant thief in issue 245 of the *Tatler* emphasised the ugliness of her facial appearance and the irregular look of her nose. The woman concerned, a Miss *Bridget Howd'ee*, was described as a:

> short, thick, lively, hard-favoured Wench, of about Twenty nine Years of Age, her Eyes small and bleared, her Nose very broad at Bottom, and turning up at the End; her Mouth wide, and Lips of an unusual Thickness; two Teeth out before, the rest black and uneven.

As a result of the negative associations attached to the misshapen nose, its appearance in 'polite society' could also be a direct point of contention and cause negative remarks. A correspondent whose letter was published in article 289 of the *Tatler* complained that he

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[41] S. Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 37.
[42] *The Tatler*, No. 260 (7th December 1710).

had been verbally attacked by a man who took offence at the appearance of his large nose. It was stated:

> Being in Company this Evening with a Youth of more than ordinary Fire, he observed my Nose to be somewhat larger than his; *upon* which he took a Dislike to my Face, and towards the End of the Night could not forbear *telling* me, that he thought it *an* Affront to thrust the said Nose into civil Company.

The tale culminated in the victim's nose actually being cut off by the sword of the person who had been affronted by it. While this does represent an extreme example, it demonstrates that the negative characteristics with which the nose was associated meant that the nose was frequently subject to negative comment in 'polite society'. It also shows that if its appearance was judged to be deformed, it could have extremely detrimental effects on the ways in which people were perceived and treated by others. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that Addison and Steele repeatedly urged their readers not to judge other social actors in this manner and explicitly condemned instances, such as that outlined above, where people were negatively judged in relation to the shape and look of their noses.

While the nose was frequently used by Addison and Steele as an 'impolite' symbol, other features of the face were thought to be particularly expressive of 'politeness'. One of the most important markers of personal 'politeness', particularly for women, was modesty. Eustace Budgell clearly noted the association between modesty and 'politeness' in issue 373 of the *Spectator,* where he asserted:

> If I was put to define Modesty, I would call it *The Reflection of an Ingenuous Mind*, either when a Man has committed an Action for which he censures himself, or fancies he is exposed to the Censure of others.

Modesty was believed to be most readily discernible in the blushing of the cheek. Budgell proposed that it was only an imprudent man who 'can break through all the Rules of Decency and Morality without a Blush'. In the *Guardian* the imprudence of a self-acknowledged fortune hunter named Will Bareface was indicated by his disdainful account of the action of blushing. In issue 38, the rude Mr Bareface stated:

> I never knew any but you musty Philosophers applaud Blushes, and your selves will allow that they are caused, either by some real Imperfection, or the Apprehension of Defect where there is not any; but for my part I hate Mistakes, and shall not suspect myself wrongfully.

This evidence suggests that in elite society the blushing cheek was perceived as a literal symbol of an individual's modesty and 'politeness'.

The appearance of the mouth was also a subject of considerable comment in the didactic journals. In elite culture, the ways that people smiled or laughed was believed to convey social information about their character. The narrator of the *Guardian,* Nestor Ironside, stated in article number 29:

> It may be remarked in general under this Head that the Laugh of Men of Wit is for the most part but a faint constrained kind of Half-Laugh, as such Persons are never without some Diffidence about them; but that of Fools is the most honest, natural, open Laugh in the World.

Accordingly, the narrator proposed that it was appropriate to make observations on a person's temperament through observing their laugh or smile. In order to provide his readers with their own means of judging others, he arranged kinds of 'Laughers' under the following heads:

> The Dimplers,
> The Smilers,
> The Laughers,
> The Grinners,
> The Horse-Laughers.

The 'dimple', it was stated, was a form of smile practised to 'give a Grace to the Features' that was primarily displayed by women who desired not to disorder the beauty of their countenance with the 'Ruffle of a Smile'. The author praised the display of this smile as demonstrating modesty. He observed that young widows frequently affected this smile and praised them for doing so, because it enabled them to appear easy in company while following the strict rules of decency necessary to their situation. The dimple smile, when employed by women, was consequently believed to be the best means of displaying beauty and modesty.

However, the article stated that the 'dimple' was subject to frequent misuse by effeminate fops. It was asserted:

> The Effeminate Fop, who by the long Exercise of his Countenance at the Glass hath reduced it to an exact Discipline, may claim a Place in this Clan. You see him upon any Occasion, to give Spirit to his Discourse, admire his own Eloquence by a Dimple.

This passage reveals that the 'dimple', when employed by men or 'fops', was supposed to show that the individual employing it was vain and self-satisfied rather than 'modest' or 'polite'. It therefore demonstrates that the 'dimple' was considered to be a form of smiling that was peculiarly female and consequently only had 'polite' resonances when used by women; moreover, that when it was used by men it was considered to represent a challenge to accepted gender norms. This shows that there were clear rules in 'polite society' which dictated what forms of facial expression were appropriate for different social actors to display.

While when certain social actors displayed the 'dimple' it could be judged negatively, the grin was universally abhorred. It was asserted in the *Guardian* issue 29 that the grin was most often used by 'old amorous Dotards' who endeavoured to recall 'Youth to their Cheeks' when they saw a 'young blooming Wench' they liked the look of. The distasteful aspects of the grin were also examined in article 173 of the *Spectator,* where the narrator discussed a grinning competition he had seen recently at a country fair. The first competitor, it was explained, was a 'black swarthy Frenchman', who was aided in affecting a horrible grimace because he was 'a Man naturally of a wither'd Look, and hard Features'. Despite his valiant efforts, however, this competitor was quickly defeated by an angry Jacobite, whose grin was said to be so fierce that it had caused half a dozen women to miscarry. Nevertheless, the Jacobite's angry grin proved no match against the final competitor, a country cobbler, who 'At the very first Grinn ...cast every Human Feature out of his Countenance; at the second...became the Face of a Spout; at the third a Baboon, at the fourth the Head of a Bass-Viol, and at the fifth a Pair of Nut-Crackers'. This evidence demonstrates that the grin was thought to be a form of facial appearance that was only displayed by people of the lower orders, political dissenters and those of a different national extraction, who were not aware, or concerned, that this action was 'impolite'. In his concluding statement Mr Spectator certainly identified the grin as a form of embodied action only displayed by the 'impolite'. He proposed:

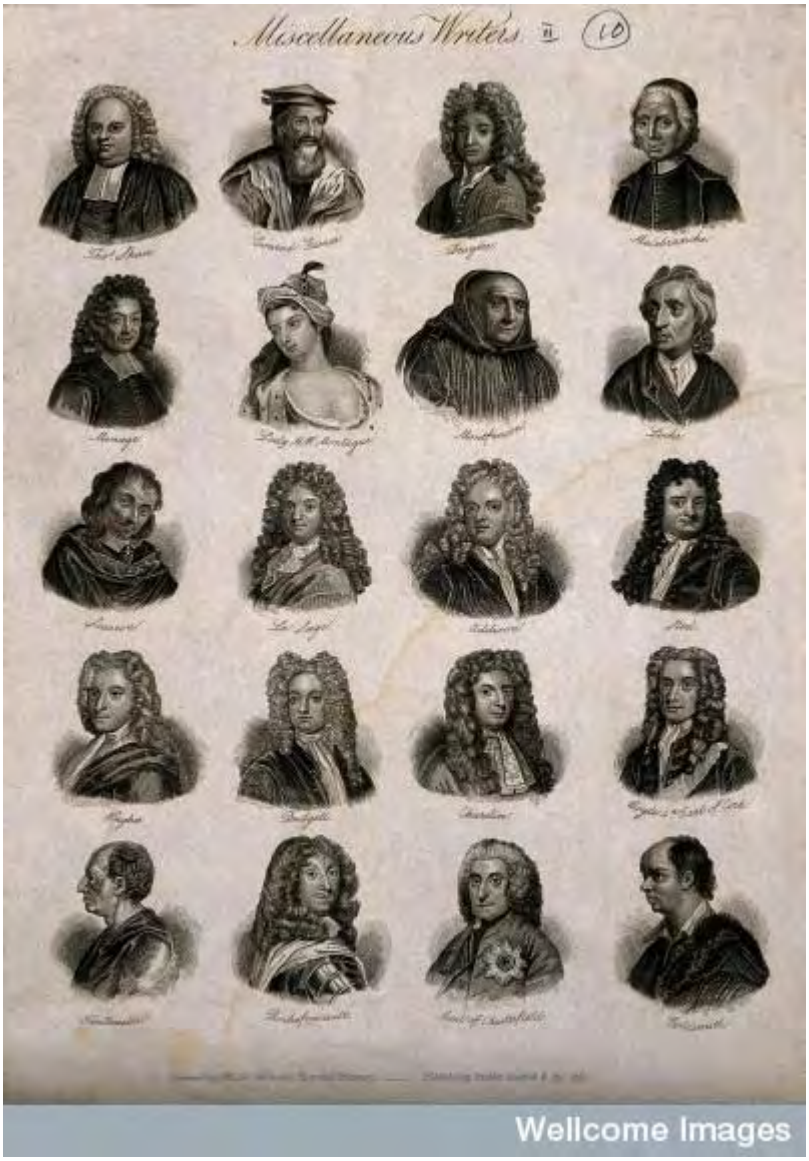
> I would nevertheless leave it to the Consideration of those who are the Patrons of this monstrous Trial of Skill, whether or not they are not guilty, in some measure, of an Affront to their Species, in treating after this manner the *human face divine*…whether the raising of such silly Competitions among the Ignorant, proposing Prizes for such useless Accomplishments, filling the common People's Heads with such Senseless Ambitions…has not in it something Immoral as well as Ridiculous.

It is important to acknowledge that particular forms of facial appearance were not simply believed to betray information about an individual's character, class, gender, political affiliation or nationality, but that contemporaries actively used the display of the face to convey particular forms of social and political information. This is clearly evident in article 81 of the *Spectator,* which discussed the ways that women sought to display their political affiliation through the placement of face patches. Mr Spectator stated that at a visit to the opera he had observed two parties of very fine women sat in opposite side-boxes to the left and right of him. He noted that after a short survey of their appearance he realised that the set of ladies sat to his right were patched on the right side of their face, while those on his left were also patched but on their left side. He stated: 'Upon Enquiry I found that the Amazons on my Right Hand were Whigs, and those on my Left, Tories'. The reason why they were placing their patches in such a manner, the narrator concluded, was because these 'coquets' were trying to attract men from different political parties by surreptitiously conveying their political affiliation through their facial appearance. This evidence demonstrates that contemporaries were keenly aware that their face was often interpreted as a symbol of their personal character and were active in manipulating the appearance of their face for their own social and political ends.

**The Face and Personal Identity**

In her survey of the relationship between the face and the soul as conceptualised in the pseudo-science of physiognomy, Patrizia Magli demonstrates that the physiognomic understanding that particular facial features displayed the inner state of the soul was at least as old as Aristotle.[43] The continuing practice of physiognomy, popular beliefs that deformities in babies were caused by a secret sin enacted by the mother, and the Christian doctrine that the body was a sign of the inner soul, throughout the Middle Ages into the Early Modern period, all further indicate the prevalence of the understanding that the body was a mirror of the soul in Western thought.

[43] P. Magli, "The Face and the Soul", op. cit., p. 88.




**Engraving by J.W. Cook, *Philosophers and virtuosi: twenty portraits* (Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, London, 1825) featuring portraits of Addison, Steele, Budgell, Locke and Hughes**

Yet, in the early eighteenth century these long and deeply held convictions were increasingly being challenged by a range of social, intellectual and material developments.[44] While the previous discussion has demonstrated that the appearance of the face and its features were read as symbols of the soul, it is important to acknowledge that through their journals Addison and Steele sought to reconstitute these beliefs in several subtle but highly

[44] R. Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, op. cit., p. 249.

significant ways by aligning them with new questions concerning the construction of personal identity.

At a very basic level, 'politeness', in the way it was presented as a code of social behaviour by Addison and Steele, could be described as a project of the 'self'. This is because, above all, these authors were concerned with fashioning man anew as a social being by encouraging their readers to examine aspects of their own behaviour in reference to others. Addison stated in issue 215 of the *Spectator*:

> I consider an Human Soul without Education like Marble in the Quarry, which shews none of its inherent Beauties, till the Skill of the Polisher fetches out the Colours, makes the Surface shine, and discovers every ornamental Cloud, Spot and Vein that runs through the Body of it.

This assertion suggests that Addison and Steele did not follow the traditional philosophical belief that the human soul was intrinsic and given by God, but rather recognised it as an entity created and sculpted by individuals themselves through their education and engagement with culture. Indeed, through the didactic journals, Addison and Steele sought to offer precise models of conscious selfhood in order to provide readers with means of rendering personal identity in relation to society's prevailing social mores; a selfhood that was defined by the appropriate acquisition of certain forms of 'polite' social behaviour.

In the didactic journals the body was presented as an important medium through which individuals could practically render and display personal identity. This understanding was inextricably tied to the way in which these authors understood the constitution of self, derived from the philosophy of John Locke, as the totality of the actions, impressions, thoughts and feelings acquired through lived embodied experience and self-reflection that constituted a person as a conscious being[45]. Repeatedly, Addison and Steele referenced the close connection between the body and soul, and the ways the character of the soul could be crafted and influenced by the conduct of the body. Throughout these journals the relationship between the body and soul was presented as a fine balance. In a discussion concerning exercise in the *Spectator* in article 115, it was stated that without proper forms of embodied labour 'the Body cannot subsist in its Vigour, nor the Soul act with Cheerfulness'. In this statement Addison and Steele revealed their belief that the soul could act upon the body and vice versa. Through their writing, Addison and Steele thus effectively

[45] ibid., p. 77.

constituted the body as an essential feature of personal identity, as they presented it both as the source of the soul's understanding and the means through which the soul could be physically constituted and displayed.

When this understanding manifested itself in discussion concerning the social judgement of individuals through the appearance of the face, Addison and Steele firstly sought to investigate situations where people were judged on their 'natural' facial appearance. They were clearly aware that first appearances could directly inform how individuals were perceived and socially judged. Besides this, they recognised that older understandings of the face as an inscription of the soul continued to thrive. Addison stated in number 86 of the *Spectator*:

> We are no sooner presented to any one we never saw before, but we are immediately struck with the Idea of a proud, a reserved, an affable, or a good-natured man; and upon our first going into a Company of Strangers, our Benevolence or Aversion, Awe or Contempt, rises naturally towards several particular Persons before we have heard them speak a single Word, or so much as know who they are.

The frequent usage of phrases such as 'our thoughts are in our features' and 'every passion gives a particular cast to the countenance' further attests to the belief that the face and its expressions were a direct indication of individual character. This is made explicit in the following statement by Mr Spectator: 'When I see a Man with a sour shrivelled face, I cannot forbear pitying his Wife; and when I meet with an open ingenuous Countenance, think on the happiness of his Friends, his Family and Relations'. Together, these passages reveal that Addison and Steele recognised that within 'polite' society facial appearance was read as an indicator of the self and the face inextricably linked to the social identity of the person that possessed it.

However, while acknowledging that looks could inform how contemporaries were socially judged, Addison and Steele did not necessarily regard the judgement of individuals on aspects of facial appearance that they were born with as a good or proper measure of personal character. Throughout the didactic journals, readers were warned that appearances could be deceptive and to be wary of using traditional physiognomic associations as a judge of character. The assertion that looks could be deceiving was nowhere clearer than in discussions concerning the practice of women wearing makeup. A correspondent to the *Spectator,* whose letter featured in issue 41, wrote to Mr Spectator to urge him to warn other members of society about the deception of women that 'painted'.

He informed the narrator: 'They are some of them so Exquisitely skilful in this Way, that give them but a Tolerable Pair of Eyes to set up with, and they will make Bosom, Lips, Cheeks, and Eye-brows, by their own Industry'. The language employed in advertisements for cosmetics suggests that this was precisely the appeal of such products. The 'Famous Bavarian Red Liquor' proclaimed that it gave 'such a delightful blushing Colour to the Cheeks of those that are White or Pale, that it is not to be distinguished from a natural fine Complexion, nor perceived to be artificial by the nearest Friend'.[46] This issue of deception was certainly revealed in other parts of the letter sent to the *Spectator* mentioned above. The correspondent stated of his own experience: 'As for my Dear, never Man was so inamour'd as I was of her fair Forehead, Neck and Arms…but to my great Astonishment, I find they were all the Effect of Art'. The subject of the man's concern appears to have been not that his wife was not as beautiful as he had first thought, but that she had deceived him before their marriage and was thus not the woman of character he thought, as she was essentially deceitful in nature. This suggests that concerns relating to the use of cosmetic products in the didactic journals centred around fears that they were enabling individuals to construct false personal identities and mask their true characters. The development of material products such as cosmetics, were therefore challenging long-held beliefs that the face could be interpreted as a mirror of the soul[47].

On the other hand, Addison and Steele cautioned their readers that it was not only faces that wore makeup that could be deceptive, and warned that natural beauty itself could mask a flawed moral character beneath and even cause the soul to become corrupted. In a discussion of beauty, Steele proposed:

> Beauty has been the Delight and Torment of the World since it began…It is not indeed to be denied, that there is something irresistible in a Beauteous Form…Yet so it is, that People can bear any Quality in the World better than Beauty…Handsome People usually are so fantastically pleased with themselves that if they do not kill at first Sight, as the Phrase is, a second Interview disarms them of all their Power[48].

[46] *The Spectator*, No. 428 (11th July 1712).
[47] R. Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, op. cit., p. 251.
[48] *The Spectator*, No. 144 (15th August 1711).

This shows that Addison and Steele, while admitting their own guilt in this respect, explicitly identified the societal preoccupation with beauty and its use as a measure of individual character as a social illness causing people to neglect their moral instruction and enabling 'impolite' people to hide behind a handsome façade from the censure of society. Addison and Steele thus explained to their readers that beauty itself could have a corrupting influence on the individual, as well as upon society.

In order to highlight the potential danger of beauty, in issue number 33 of the *Spectator* Addison and Steele provided an exemplary moral tale that featured the experiences of two sisters called Laetitia and Daphne, in which good character conquered beauty. While the first sister, Laetitia, was described as 'one of the greatest beauties of the age in which she lives', Daphne was said to be in 'no way remarkable for any Charms of her Person'. Then again, it was explained that all the commendations Laetitia had received since childhood had left her 'insupportably Vain and Insolent, towards all who have to do with her'. Conversely, it was noted that because she did not have her sister's features to recommend her, Daphne had 'found herself obliged to acquire some Accomplishments to make up for the want of those Attractions she saw in her sister', and, as a result, had cultivated a good-humoured, open and innocent countenance. It was stated that after a young lover had come to the house to court the beautiful Laetitia, he had quickly left off his pursuit and turned his attentions to Daphne because of the attractions of her good-humoured countenance. In the end, therefore, it was Daphne rather than Laetitia who won the prize of being made the young suitor's wife. This story, in many ways, thus stood as a moral tale that told of the conquest of character over beauty.

After showing their readers that 'looks' could be deceptive, Addison and Steele sought to construct alternative models that individuals could use to judge others and present themselves 'politely' through their external embodied form. Firstly, in accordance with their understanding that the mind could influence the appearance of the body, Addison and Steele proposed that a good moral character could imprint itself upon the appearance of the face and render the individual 'beautiful'. This was significant as it presented facial beauty as a quality that could be displayed by all through the cultivation of 'polite' cultural mores. In article 33 of the *Spectator*, Addison provided several key maxims for women that revealed the 'true Secret and Art of preserving Beauty'. It was stated:

> No Woman can be Handsome by the Force of Features alone, any more than she can be Witty only by the Help of Speech…Pride destroys all Symmetry and Grace, and Affectation is a more terrible Enemy to fine Faces than the Small-Pox…no Woman is capable of being Beautiful, who is not incapable of being False.

In this manner, Addison and Steele firmly positioned the cultivation of a 'polite' character as the primary means of making one's facial appearance beautiful. Steele noted this explicitly in article 86 of the *Spectator,* in which he stated:

> I have seen many an amiable Piece of Deformity, and have observed a certain Chearfulness in as bad a System of Features as ever was clap'd together, which hath appeared more lovely than all the blooming Charms of an insolent Beauty.

It is important to note, however, that when Addison and Steele spoke of how a good moral character could make an ugly face beautiful, they were largely speaking in metaphorical terms and were using this to describe an individual's character as it was displayed by the body, rather than their facial appearance alone. This understanding demonstrates the ways in which the authors sought to advise their readers not to judge individuals on aspects of their facial appearance over which they had no control, but rather in respect to what their malleable expression revealed about their inner morality and temperament. Addison and Steele were certainly active in their attempts to discourage their readers from judging others on physical appearances that they had no ability to change. It was clearly stated in the *Spectator* issue 17:

> Since our Persons are not of our own Making, when they are such as appear Defective or Uncomely, it is, methinks, an honest and laudable Fortitude to dare to be Ugly; and at least to keep our selves from being abashed with a Consciousness of Imperfections which we cannot help, and in which there is no Guilt.

Addison and Steele thus explicitly denied the ancient belief that the forms of facial appearance that people were born with represented a reflection of the soul. Rather, they urged that people should be judged in reference to their behaviour and the ways they expressed their personal identity through forms of facial expression. In the *Tatler*, the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*, Addison and Steele effectively constructed an entirely new framework for understanding the symbolic meanings of the face, which broadly reflected their efforts to reconstitute man as a social being through the promotion of 'polite' forms of social behaviour.

**Conclusion**

This survey of the meanings attached to the face in the early eighteenth-century didactic journals has clearly demonstrated that these sources represent valuable, versatile and highly revealing 'archives' of evidence for examining the ways in which the face was symbolically constituted and perceived. It has further shown that the symbolic meanings attached to the face and its different parts, which enabled individuals to interpret what it was they perceived when looking upon a face, were highly complex and constructed in reference to a diverse array of different cultural understandings and discourses. However, this paper has also evidenced that by investigating the meanings attached to the face through the analytical lens of 'politeness', it can be clearly demonstrated that these associations were constructed in relation to the prevailing social mores and demands of culture at this historical juncture.

On the other hand, the understanding that the face was perceived as a series of symbols that conveyed social and cultural information about the individual that displayed it may appear paradoxical in light of Addison and Steele's own assertion that individuals should not be judged by external appearances. Nevertheless, this paradox can be resolved by looking at the distinctive aspects of the framework that Addison and Steele constructed and promoted for interpreting the symbolic meanings of the face. It must be understood that Addison and Steele did not deny that looks were significant in the rendering of personal identity and that the face represented an important site for judging an individual's character. What they refuted was the older belief that the face could be judged as an imputable signature of the God-given soul, proposing instead that individuals should only be judged on aspects of the appearance of the face that they could control through their expression. Through their didactic journals these authors thus taught their readers that the face should not be treated as a static symbol of self, but rather as an important means through which the self could be constituted and presented.

When the evidence concerning the construction of meanings about the face in the didactic journals is re-examined in view of this understanding, it becomes clear that Addison and Steele were primarily preoccupied with providing information about the social meanings attached to forms of 'expression' that could be managed by the individual. Through analysis of the meanings of the expression of the eyes, the blush of the cheek and movement of the

mouth, Addison and Steele primarily sought to instruct readers on how to display particular forms of 'politeness' through the expression of their faces. Moreover, it must also be acknowledged that discussions which presented a view that the face could be read as a 'natural' indicator of the inner soul were more often 'implicit' than 'explicit', betraying Addison and Steele's self-acknowledged difficulties in separating themselves from older understandings, and were more likely to be contained in letters and advertisements written by other authors. It can therefore be argued that, in the early eighteenth century, looks preoccupied the English elite because Addison and Steele clearly demonstrated that the expression of the face represented an important means through which individuals could demonstrate their 'politeness'. In turn, by formulating and disseminating this framework of interpretation and understanding, Addison and Steele effectively constituted an idealised notion of what the 'polite' face should look like, which could be of direct use for contemporaries when considering their personal presentation and the social judgement of others.

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